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Norway nets its own spies

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Norway has scheduled a trial for two men who published information about secret intelligence-gathering stations.

The trial, which begins May 11, is likely to prove a severe embarrassment to the United States and Norway, for the stations gather data for the West on Soviet military action. It is all the more embarrassing for because the research was financed by the Norwegian government.

The affair highlights Norway's difficulties in trying to walk a tightrope on defense policy. For the United States and other NATO allies, Norway has to appear strong, especially since it shares a common border with the Soviet Union.

For the benefit of neutral neighbors Sweden and Finland, Norway must appear to have a liberal foreign policy inclined toward disarmament and establishing a Scandinavian nuclear-free zone.

The men on trial, Norwegian Nils-Petter Gleditsch and New Zealander Owen Wilkes, worked as researchers for the state-backed Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO).

The methods used over a period of three years to unmask the spy stations are hardly likely to boost NATO's confidence in Norway as an ally. Wilkes and Gleditsch say they looked up the stations in the Norwegian telephone directory, which were listed under "defense radio posts."

They also used trade union records to trace the stations. "All defense workers belong to a union," Wilkes explained. "So if you come across 50 union members in a remote fishing village you know you've found another spy station."